PADRE IGNACIO

OWEN WISTER

"THE CONVERT SAT IN HIS CHAIR NO LONGER, BUT STOOD SINGING BY THE PIANO"

PADRE IGNACIO

OR

THE SONG OF TEMPTATION

BY

OWEN WISTER

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I

T Santa Ysabel del Mar the season was at one of those moments when the air rests quiet over land and sea. The old breezes were gone; the new ones were not yet risen. The flowers in the mission garden opened wide; no wind came by day or night to shake the loose petals from their stems. Along the basking, silent, many-colored shore gathered and lingered the crisp odors of the mountains. The dust hung golden and motionless long after the rider was behind the hill, and the Pa-

cific lay like a floor of sapphire, whereon to walk beyond the setting sun into the East. One white sail shone there. Instead of an hour, it had been from dawn till afternoon in sight between the short headlands; and the Padre had hoped that it might be the ship his homesick heart awaited. But it had slowly passed. From an arch in his garden cloisters he was now watching the last of it. Presently it was gone, and the great ocean lay empty. The Padre put his glasses in his lap. For a short while he read in his breviary, but soon forgot it again. He looked at the flowers and sunny ridges, then at the huge blue triangle of sea which the opening of the hills let into sight. "Paradise," he murmured, "need not hold more beauty and peace. But I think I would exchange all my remaining years of this for one sight again of Paris or Seville. May God forgive me such a thought!"

Across the unstirred fragrance of oleanders the bell for vespers began to ring. Its tones passed over the Padre as he watched the sea in his garden. They reached his parishioners in their adobe dwellings near by. The gentle circles of sound floated outward upon the smooth, immense silence—over the vines and pear-trees; down the avenues of the olives; into the planted fields, whence women and children began to return; then out of the lap of the valley along the yellow uplands, where the men that rode among the cattle paused, looking down like birds at the map of their home. Then the sound widened, faint, unbroken, until it met Temptation in the guise of a youth, riding toward the Padre from the South, and cheered the steps of Temptation's jaded horse.

"For a day, one single day of Paris!"

repeated the Padre, gazing through his cloisters at the empty sea.

Once in the year the mother-world remembered him. Once in the year, from Spain, tokens and home-tidings came to him, sent by certain beloved friends of his youth. A barkentine brought him these messages. Whenever thus the mother-world remembered him, it was like the touch of a warm hand, a dear and tender caress; a distant life, by him long left behind, seemed to be drawing the exile homeward from these alien shores. As the time for his letters and packets drew near, the eyes of Padre Ignacio would be often fixed wistfully upon the harbor, watching for the barkentine. Sometimes, as to-day, he mistook other sails for hers, but hers he mistook never. That Pacific Ocean, which, for all its hues and jeweled mists, he could not learn to love, had, since long before his day,

been furrowed by the keels of Spain. Traders, and adventurers, and men of God had passed along this coast, planting their colonies and cloisters; but it was not his ocean. In the year that we, a thin strip of patriots away over on the Atlantic edge of the continent, declared ourselves an independent nation, a Spanish ship, in the name of Saint Francis, was unloading the centuries of her own civilization at the Golden Gate. San Diego had come earlier. Then, slowly, as mission after mission was built along the soft coast wilderness, new ports were established—at Santa Barbara, and by Point San Luis for San Luis Obispo, which lay inland a little way up the gorge where it opened among the hills. Thus the world reached these missions by water; while on land, through the mountains, a road led to them, and also to many more that were too distant behind the hills for ships to serve—a

rough road, long and lonely, punctuated with church towers and gardens. For the Fathers gradually so stationed their settlements that the traveler might each morning ride out from one mission and by evening of a day's fair journey ride into the next. A lonely, rough, dangerous road, but lovely, too, with a name like music—*El Camino Real.* Like music also were the names of the missions — *San Juan Capistrano, San Luis Rey de Francia, San Miguel, Santa Ynez* — their very list is a song.

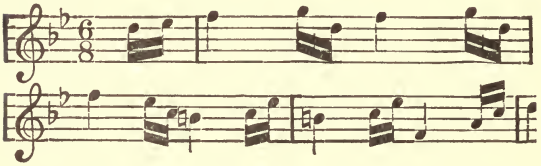
So there, by-and-by, was our continent, with the locomotive whistling from Savannah to Boston along its eastern edge, and on the western the scattered chimes of Spain, ringing among the unpeopled mountains. Thus grew the two sorts of civilization—not equally. We know what has happened since. To-day the locomotive is whistling

also from The Golden Gate to San Diego; but still the old mission-road goes through the mountains, and along it the footsteps of vanished Spain are marked with roses, and broken cloisters, and the crucifix.

But this was 1855. Only the barkentine brought to Padre Ignacio the signs from the world that he once had known and loved so dearly. As for the new world making a rude noise to the northward, he trusted that it might keep away from Santa Ysabel, and he waited for the vessel that was overdue with its package containing his single worldly luxury.

As the little, ancient bronze bell continued swinging in the tower, its plaintive call reached something in the Padre's memory. Softly, absently, he began to sing. He took up the slow strain not quite correctly, and dropped it, and took

it up again, always in cadence with the bell:



At length he heard himself, and, glancing at the belfry, smiled a little. "It is a pretty tune," he said, " and it always made me sorry for poor Fra Diavolo. Auber himself confessed to me that he had made it sad and put the hermitage bell to go with it, because he too was grieved at having to kill his villain, and wanted him, if possible, to die in a religious frame of mind. And Auber touched glasses with me and said—how well I remember it!—' Is it the good Lord, or is it merely the devil, that makes me always have a weakness for rascals?' I told him it was the devil. I was not a

priest then. I could not be so sure with my answer now." And then Padre Ignacio repeated Auber's remark in French: " ' Est-ce le bon Dieu, ou est-ce bien le diable, qui veut toujours que j'aime les coquins?' I don't know! I don't know! I wonder if Auber has composed anything lately? I wonder who is singing ' Zerlina ' now?"

He cast a farewell look at the ocean, and took his steps between the monastic herbs, the jasmines and the oleanders to the sacristy. " At least," he said, " if we cannot carry with us into exile the friends and the places we have loved, music will go whither we go, even to an end of the world such as this. — Felipe!" he called to his organist. " Can they sing the music I taught them for the *Dixit Dominus* to-night?"

" Yes, father, surely."

" Then we will have that. And, Felipe—" The Padre crossed the chancel to the small,

shabby organ. "Rise, my child, and listen. Here is something you can learn. Why, see now if you cannot learn it from a single hearing."

The swarthy boy of sixteen stood watching his master's fingers, delicate and white, as they played. Thus, of his own accord, he had begun to watch them when a child of six; and the Padre had taken the wild, half-scared, spellbound creature and made a musician of him.

"There, Felipe!" he said now. "Can you do it? Slower, and more softly, muchacho mio. It is about the death of a man, and it should go with our bell."

The boy listened. "Then the father has played it a tone too low," said he, "for our bell rings the note of *sol*, or something very near it, as the father must surely know." He placed the melody in the right

key—an easy thing for him; and the Padre was delighted.

"Ah, my Felipe," he exclaimed, "what could you and I not do if we had a better organ! Only a little better! See! above this row of keys would be a second row, and many more stops. Then we would make such music as has never yet been heard in California. But my people are so poor and so few! And some day I shall have passed from them, and it will be too late."

"Perhaps," ventured Felipe, "the Americanos—"

"They care nothing for us, Felipe. They are not of our religion—or of any religion, from what I can hear. Don't forget my *Dixit Dominus.*"

The Padre retired once more to the sacristy, while the horse that brought Temptation came over the hill.

The hour of service drew near; and as

the Padre waited he once again stepped out for a look at the ocean; but the blue triangle of water lay like a picture in its frame of land, bare as the sky. "I think, from the color, though," said he, "that a little more wind must have begun out there."

The bell rang a last short summons to prayer. Along the road from the south a young rider, leading a pack-animal, ambled into the mission and dismounted. Church was not so much in his thoughts as food and, after due digestion, a bed; but the doors stood open, and, as everybody was passing within them, more variety was to be gained by joining this company than by waiting outside alone until they should return from their devotions. So he seated himself in a corner near the entrance, and after a brief, jaunty glance at the sunburned, shaggy congregation, made himself as comfortable as might be. He had not seen a face worth

keeping his eyes open for. The simple choir and simple fold, gathered for even-song, paid him no attention—a rough American bound for the mines was but an object of aversion to them.

The Padre, of course, had been instantly aware of the stranger's presence. To be aware of unaccustomed presences is the sixth sense with vicars of every creed and heresy; and if the parish is lonely and the worshipers few and seldom varying, a newcomer will gleam out like a new book to be read. And a trained priest learns to read keenly the faces of those who assemble to worship under his guidance. But American vagrants, with no thoughts save of gold-digging, and an overweening illiterate jargon for speech, had long ceased to interest this priest, even in his starvation for company and talk from the outside world; and therefore after the intoning he sat with his

homesick thoughts unchanged, to draw both pain and enjoyment from the music that he had set to the *Dixit Dominus*. He listened to the tender chorus that opens *William Tell;* and, as the Latin psalm proceeded, pictures of the past rose between him and the altar. One after another came these strains he had taken from operas famous in their day, until at length the Padre was murmuring to some music seldom long out of his heart—not the Latin verse which the choir sang, but the original French words:

"Ah, voilà mon envie,
Voilà mon seul désir:
Rendez moi ma patrie,
Ou laissez moi mourir."

Which may be rendered:

But one wish I implore,
One wish is all my cry:
Give back my native land once more,
Give back, or let me die.

Then it happened that his eye fell again upon the stranger near the door, and he straightway forgot his *Dixit Dominus*. The face of the young man was no longer hidden by the slouching position he had at first taken. "I only noticed his clothes at first," thought the Padre. Restlessness was plain upon the handsome brow, and violence was in the mouth; but Padre Ignacio liked the eyes. "He is not saying any prayers," he surmised, presently. "I doubt if he has said any for a long while. And he knows my music. He is of educated people. He cannot be American. And now—yes, he has taken—I think it must be a flower, from his pocket. I shall have him to dine with me." And vespers ended with rosy clouds of eagerness drifting across the Padre's brain.

II

UT the stranger made his own beginning. As the priest came from the church, the rebellious young figure was waiting. "Your organist tells me," he said, impetuously, "that it is you who—"

"May I ask with whom I have the great pleasure of speaking?" said the Padre, putting formality to the front and his pleasure out of sight.

The stranger's face reddened beneath its sun-beaten bronze, and he became aware of the Padre's pale features, molded by refinement and the world. "I beg your lenience," said he, with a graceful and confident utterance, as of equal to equal. "My

name is Gaston Villeré, and it was time I should be reminded of my manners."

The Padre's hand waved a polite negative.

"Indeed, yes, Padre. But your music has amazed me. If you carried such associations as— Ah! the days and the nights!"—he broke off. "To come down a California mountain and find Paris at the bottom! *The Huguenots,* Rossini, Hérold —I was waiting for *Il Trobatore.*"

"Is that something new?" inquired the Padre, eagerly.

The young man gave an exclamation. "The whole world is ringing with it!" he cried.

"But Santa Ysabel del Mar is a long way from the whole world," murmured Padre Ignacio.

"Indeed, it would not appear to be so," returned young Gaston. "I think the

Comédie Française must be round the corner."

A thrill went through the priest at the theater's name. "And have you been long in America?" he asked.

"Why, always—except two years of foreign travel after college."

"An American!" exclaimed the surprised Padre, with perhaps a tone of disappointment in his voice. "But no Americans who are yet come this way have been—have been"—he veiled the too-blunt expression of his thought—"have been familiar with *The Huguenots*," he finished, making a slight bow.

Villeré took his under-meaning. "I come from New Orleans," he returned. "And in New Orleans there live many of us who can recognize a—who can recognize good music wherever we hear it." And he made a slight bow in his turn.

The Padre laughed outright with pleasure and laid his hand upon the young man's arm. "You have no intention of going away to-morrow, I trust?"

"With your leave," answered Gaston, "I will have such an intention no longer."

It was with the air and gait of mutual understanding that the two now walked on together toward the Padre's door. The guest was twenty-five, the host sixty.

"And have you been in America long?" inquired Gaston.

"Twenty years."

"And at Santa Ysabel how long?"

"Twenty years."

"I should have thought," said Gaston, looking lightly at the desert and unpeopled mountains, "that now and again you might have wished to travel."

"Were I your age," murmured Padre Ignacio, "it might be so."

The evening had now ripened to the long after-glow of sunset. The sea was the purple of grapes, and wine-colored hues flowed among the high shoulders of the mountains.

"I have seen a sight like this," said Gaston, "between Granada and Malaga."

"So you know Spain!" said the Padre.

Often he had thought of this resemblance, but never till now met any one to share his thought. The courtly proprietor of San Fernando and the other patriarchal rancheros with whom he occasionally exchanged visits across the wilderness knew hospitality and inherited gentle manners, sending to Europe for silks and laces to give their daughters; but their eyes had not looked upon Granada, and their ears had never listened to *William Tell*.

"It is quite singular," pursued Gaston, "how one nook in the world will suddenly remind you of another nook that may be

thousands of miles away. One morning, behind the Quai Voltaire, an old, yellow house with rusty balconies made me almost homesick for New Orleans."

"The Quai Voltaire!" said the Padre.

"I heard Rachel in *Valérie* that night," the young man went on. "Did you know that she could sing, too? She sang several verses by an astonishing little Jew violoncellist that is come up over there."

The Padre gazed down at his blithe guest. "To see somebody, somebody, once again, is very pleasant to a hermit!"

"It cannot be more pleasant than arriving at an oasis," returned Gaston.

They had delayed on the threshold to look at the beauty of the evening, and now the priest watched his parishioners come and go. "How can one make companions—" he began; then, checking himself, he said: "Their souls are as sacred and immortal as

mine, and God helps me to help them. But in this world it is not immortal souls that we choose for companions; it is kindred tastes, intelligences, and—and so I and my books are growing old together, you see," he added, more lightly. "You will find my volumes as behind the times as myself."

He had fallen into talk more intimate than he wished; and while the guest was uttering something polite about the nobility of missionary work, he placed him in an easy-chair and sought *aguardiente* for his immediate refreshment. Since the year's beginning there had been no guest for him to bring into his rooms, or to sit beside him in the high seats at table, set apart for the *gente fina*.

Such another library was not then in California; and though Gaston Villeré, in leaving Harvard College, had shut *Horace* and *Sophocles* for ever at the earliest in-

stant possible under academic requirements, he knew the Greek and Latin names that he now saw as well as he knew those of *Shakspere, Dante, Molière,* and *Cervantes.* These were here also; but it could not be precisely said of them, either, that they made a part of the young man's daily reading. As he surveyed the Padre's august shelves, it was with a touch of the histrionic Southern gravity which his Northern education had not wholly schooled out of him that he said:

"I fear I am no scholar, sir. But I know what writers every gentleman ought to respect."

The polished Padre bowed gravely to this compliment.

It was when his eyes caught sight of the music that the young man felt again at ease, and his vivacity returned to him. Leaving his chair, he began enthusiastically to examine the tall piles that filled one side

of the room. The volumes lay piled and scattered everywhere, making a pleasant disorder; and, as perfume comes from a flower, memories of singers and chandeliers rose bright from the printed names. *Norma*, *Tancredi*, *Don Pasquale*, *La Vestale*, dim lights in the fashions of to-day, sparkled upon the exploring Gaston, conjuring the radiant halls of Europe before him. "*The Barber of Seville!*" he presently exclaimed. "And I happened to hear it in Seville."

But Seville's name brought over the Padre a new rush of home thoughts. "Is not Andalusia beautiful?" he said. "Did you see it in April, when the flowers come?"

"Yes," said Gaston, among the music. "I was at Cordova then."

"Ah, Cordova!" murmured the Padre.

"*Semiramide!*" cried Gaston, lighting upon that opera. "That *was* a week! I

should like to live it over, every day and night of it!"

"Did you reach Malaga from Marseilles or Gibraltar?" asked the Padre, wistfully.

"From Marseilles. Down from Paris through the Rhone Valley, you know."

"Then you saw Provence! And did you go, perhaps, from Avignon to Nismes by the Pont du Gard? There is a place I have made here—a little, little place—with olive-trees. And now they have grown, and it looks something like that country, if you stand in a particular position. I will take you there to-morrow. I think you will understand what I mean."

"Another resemblance!" said the volatile and happy Gaston. "We both seem to have an eye for them. But, believe me, Padre, I could never stay here planting olives. I should go back and see the original ones—and then I'd hasten on to Paris."

And, with a volume of Meyerbeer open in his hand, Gaston hummed: "'Robert, Robert, toi que j'aime.' Why, Padre, I think that your library contains none of the masses and all of the operas in the world!"

"I will make you a little confession," said Padre Ignacio, "and then you shall give me a little absolution."

"For a penance," said Gaston; "you must play over some of these things to me."

"I suppose I could not permit myself this luxury," began the Padre, pointing to his operas, "and teach these to my choir, if the people had any worldly associations with the music. But I have reasoned that the music cannot do them harm—"

The ringing of a bell here interrupted him. "In fifteen minutes," he said, "our poor meal will be ready for you." The good Padre was not quite sincere when he spoke of a "poor meal." While getting the *aguar-*

diente for his guest he had given orders, and he knew how well such orders would be carried out. He lived alone, and generally supped simply enough, but not even the ample table at San Fernando could surpass his own on occasions. And this was for him indeed an occasion!

"Your half-breeds will think I am one of themselves," said Gaston, showing his dusty clothes. "I am not fit to be seated with you." But he did not mean this any more than his host had meant his remark about the food. In his pack, which an Indian had brought from his horse, he carried some garments of civilization. And presently, after fresh water and not a little painstaking with brush and scarf, there came back to the Padre a young guest whose elegance and bearing and ease of the great world were to the exiled priest as sweet as was his traveled conversation.

They repaired to the hall and took their seats at the head of the long table. For the Spanish centuries of stately custom lived at Santa Ysabel del Mar, inviolate, feudal, remote.

They were the only persons of quality present; and between themselves and the *gente de razon* a space intervened. Behind the Padre's chair stood an Indian to wait upon him, and another stood behind the chair of Gaston Villeré. Each of these servants wore one single white garment, and offered the many dishes to the *gente fina* and refilled their glasses. At the lower end of the table a general attendant waited upon *mesclados*—the half-breeds. There was meat with spices, and roasted quail, with various cakes and other preparations of grain; also the brown fresh olives and grapes, with several sorts of figs and plums, and preserved fruits, and white and red

wine—the white fifty years old. Beneath the quiet shining of candles, fresh-cut flowers leaned from vessels of old Mexican and Spanish make.

There at one end of this feast sat the wild, pastoral, gaudy company, speaking little over their food; and there at the other the pale Padre, questioning his visitor about Rachel. The mere name of a street would bring memories crowding to his lips; and when his guest told him of a new play he was ready with old quotations from the same author. Alfred de Vigny they spoke of, and Victor Hugo, whom the Padre disliked. Long after the *dulce*, or sweet dish, when it was the custom for the *vaqueros* and the rest of the retainers to rise and leave the *gente fina* to themselves, the host sat on in the empty hall, fondly talking to his guest of his bygone Paris and fondly learning of the later Paris that the guest had seen. And

thus the two lingered, exchanging their enthusiasms, while the candles waned, and the long-haired Indians stood silent behind the chairs.

"But we must go to my piano," the host exclaimed. For at length they had come to a lusty difference of opinion. The Padre, with ears critically deaf, and with smiling, unconvinced eyes, was shaking his head, while young Gaston sang *Trovatore* at him, and beat upon the table with a fork.

"Come and convert me, then," said Padre Ignacio, and he led the way. "Donizetti I have always admitted. There, at least, is refinement. If the world has taken to this Verdi, with his street-band music— But there, now! Sit down and convert me. Only don't crush my poor little Erard with Verdi's hoofs. I brought it when I came. It is behind the times, too. And, oh, my dear boy, our organ is still worse. So old,

so old! To get a proper one I would sacrifice even this piano of mine in a moment—only the tinkling thing is not worth a sou to anybody except its master. But there! Are you quite comfortable?" And having seen to his guest's needs, and placed spirits and cigars and an ash-tray within his reach, the Padre sat himself comfortably in his chair to hear and expose the false doctrine of *Il Trobatore*.

By midnight all of the opera that Gaston could recall had been played and sung twice. The convert sat in his chair no longer, but stood singing by the piano. The potent swing and flow of rhythms, the torrid, copious inspiration of the South, mastered him. "Verdi has grown," he cried. "Verdi is become a giant." And he swayed to the beat of the melodies, and waved an enthusiastic arm. He demanded every note. Why did not Gaston remember it all? But

if the barkentine would arrive and bring the whole music, then they would have it right! And he made Gaston teach him what words he knew. "'Non ti scordar,'" he sang—"'non ti scordar di me.' That is genius. But one sees how the world moves when one is out of it. 'A nostri monti ritorneremo'; home to our mountains. Ah, yes, there is genius again." And the exile sighed and his spirit voyaged to distant places, while Gaston continued brilliantly with the music of the final scene.

Then the host remembered his guest. "I am ashamed of my selfishness," he said. "It is already to-morrow."

"I have sat later in less good company," answered the pleasant Gaston. "And I shall sleep all the sounder for making a convert."

"You have dispensed roadside alms," said the Padre, smiling. "And that should win excellent dreams."

Thus, with courtesies more elaborate than the world has time for at the present day, they bade each other good-night and parted, bearing their late candles along the quiet halls of the mission. To young Gaston in his bed easy sleep came without waiting, and no dreams at all. Outside his open window was the quiet, serene darkness, where the stars shone clear, and tranquil perfumes hung in the cloisters. But while the guest lay sleeping all night in unchanged position like a child, up and down between the oleanders went Padre Ignacio, walking until dawn. Temptation indeed had come over the hill and entered the cloisters.

III

AY showed the ocean's surface no longer glassy, but lying like a mirror breathed upon; and there between the short headlands came a sail, gray and plain against the flat water. The priest watched through his glasses, and saw the gradual sun grow strong upon the canvas of the barkentine. The message from his world was at hand, yet to-day he scarcely cared so much. Sitting in his garden yesterday, he could never have imagined such a change. But his heart did not hail the barkentine as usual. Books, music, pale paper, and print—this was all that was coming to him, and some of its savor had gone; for the siren voice of Life

had been speaking with him face to face, and in his spirit, deep down, the love of the world was restlessly answering it. Young Gaston showed more eagerness than the Padre over this arrival of the vessel that might be bringing *Trovatore* in the nick of time. Now he would have the chance, before he took his leave, to help rehearse the new music with the choir. He would be a missionary, too: a perfectly new experience.

"And you still forgive Verdi the sins of his youth?" he said to his host. "I wonder if you could forgive mine?"

"Verdi has left his behind him," retorted the Padre.

"But I am only twenty-five!" exclaimed Gaston, pathetically.

"Ah, don't go away soon!" pleaded the exile. It was the first unconcealed complaint that had escaped him, and he felt instant shame.

But Gaston was too much elated with the enjoyment of each new day to comprehend the Padre's soul. The shafts of another's pain might hardly pierce the bright armor of his gaiety. He mistook the priest's entreaty, for anxiety about his own happy spirit.

"Stay here under your care?" he asked. "It would do me no good, Padre. Temptation sticks closer to me than a brother!" and he gave that laugh of his which had disarmed severer judges than his host. "By next week I should have introduced some sin or other into your beautiful Garden of Ignorance here. It will be much safer for your flock if I go and join the other serpents at San Francisco."

Soon after breakfast the Padre had his two mules saddled, and he and his guest set forth down the hills together to the shore. And, beneath the spell and confi-

dence of pleasant, slow riding and the loveliness of everything, the young man talked freely of himself.

"And, seriously," said he, "if I missed nothing else at Santa Ysabel, I should long for—how shall I say it?—for insecurity, for danger, and of all kinds—not merely danger to the body. Within these walls, beneath these sacred bells, you live too safe for a man like me."

"Too safe!" These echoed words upon the lips of the pale Padre were a whisper too light, too deep, for Gaston's heedless ear.

"Why," the young man pursued in a spirit that was but half levity, "though I yield often to temptation, at times I have resisted it, and here I should miss the very chance to resist. Your garden could never be Eden for me, because temptation is absent from it."

"Absent!" Still lighter, still deeper, was this whisper that the Padre breathed.

"I must find life!" exclaimed Gaston. "And my fortune at the mines, I hope. I am not a bad fellow, Father. You can easily guess all the things I do. I have never, to my knowledge, harmed any one. I didn't even try to kill my adversary in an affair of honor. I gave him a mere flesh-wound, and by this time he must be quite recovered. He was my friend. But as he came between me—"

Gaston stopped, and the Padre, looking keenly at him, saw the violence that he had noticed in church pass like a flame over the young man's handsome face.

"There's nothing dishonorable," said Gaston, answering the priest's look. And then, because this look made him not quite at his ease: "Perhaps a priest might feel obliged to say it was dishonorable. She and her

father were—a man owes no fidelity before he is—but you might say that had been dishonorable."

"I have not said so, my son."

"I did what every gentleman would do," insisted Gaston.

"And that is often wrong!" said the Padre, gently and gravely. "But I'm not your confessor."

"No," said Gaston, looking down. "And it is all over. It will not begin again. Since leaving New Orleans I have traveled an innocent journey straight to you. And when I make my fortune I shall be in a position to return and—"

"Claim the pressed flower?" suggested the Padre. He did not smile.

"Ah, you remember how those things are!" said Gaston; and he laughed and blushed.

"Yes," said the Padre, looking at the an-

chored barkentine, "I remember how those things are."

For a while the vessel and its cargo and the landed men and various business and conversations occupied them. But the freight for the mission once seen to, there was not much else to detain them.

The barkentine was only a coaster like many others which had begun to fill the sea a little more of late years, and presently host and guest were riding homeward. Side by side they rode, companions to the eye, but wide apart in mood; within the turbulent young figure of Gaston dwelt a spirit that could not be more at ease, while revolt was steadily kindling beneath the schooled and placid mask of the Padre.

Yet still the strangeness of his situation in such a remote, resourceless place came back as a marvel into the young man's lively mind. Twenty years in prison, he thought,

and hardly aware of it! And he glanced at the silent priest. A man so evidently fond of music, of theaters, of the world, to whom pressed flowers had meant something once —and now contented to bleach upon these wastes! Not even desirous of a brief holiday, but finding an old organ and some old operas enough recreation! "It is his age, I suppose," thought Gaston. And then the notion of himself when he should be sixty occurred to him, and he spoke.

"Do you know, I do not believe," said he, "that I should ever reach such contentment as yours."

"Perhaps you will," said Padre Ignacio, in a low voice.

"Never!" declared the youth. "It comes only to the few, I am sure."

"Yes. Only to the few," murmured the Padre.

"I am certain that it must be a great

possession," Gaston continued; "and yet —and yet—dear me! life is a splendid thing!"

"There are several ways to live it," said the Padre.

"Only one for me!" cried Gaston. "Action, men, women, things—to be there, to be known, to play a part, to sit in the front seats; to have people tell one another, 'There goes Gaston Villeré!' and to deserve one's prominence. Why, if I were Padre of Santa Ysabel del Mar for twenty years—no! for one year—do you know what I should have done? Some day it would have been too much for me. I should have left these savages to a pastor nearer their own level, and I should have ridden down this cañon upon my mule, and stepped on board the barkentine, and gone back to my proper sphere. You will understand, sir, that I am far from venturing to make any

personal comment. I am only thinking what a world of difference lies between natures that can feel as alike as we do upon so many subjects. Why, not since leaving New Orleans have I met any one with whom I could talk, except of the weather and the brute interests common to us all. That such a one as you should be here is like a dream."

"But it is not a dream," said the Padre.

"And, sir—pardon me if I do say this—are you not wasted at Santa Ysabel del Mar? I have seen the priests at the other missions. They are—the sort of good men that I expected. But are you needed to save such souls as these?"

"There is no aristocracy of souls," said the Padre, again whispering.

"But the body and the mind!" cried Gaston. "My God, are they nothing? Do you think that they are given to us for nothing

but a trap? You cannot teach such a doctrine with your library there. And how about all the cultivated men and women away from whose quickening society the brightest of us grow numb? You have held out. But will it be for long? Are you never to save any souls of your own kind? Are not twenty years of *mesclados* enough? No, no!" finished young Gaston, hot with his unforeseen eloquence; "I should ride down some morning and take the barkentine."

Padre Ignacio was silent for a space.

"I have not offended you?" asked the young man.

"No. Anything but that. You are surprised that I should—choose—to stay here. Perhaps you may have wondered how I came to be here at all?"

"I had not intended any impertinent—"

"Oh no. Put such an idea out of your

head, my son. You may remember that I was going to make you a confession about my operas. Let us sit down in this shade."

So they picketed the mules near the stream and sat down.

IV

OU have seen," began Padre Ignacio, "what sort of a man I—was once. Indeed, it seems very strange to myself that you should have been here not twenty-four hours yet, and know so much of me. For there has come no one else at all" —the Padre paused a moment and mastered the unsteadiness that he had felt approaching in his voice—" there has been no one else to whom I have talked so freely. In my early days I had no thought of being a priest. My parents destined me for a diplomatic career. There was plenty of money and—and all the rest of it; for by inheritance came to me the acquaintance of many peo-

ple whose names you would be likely to have heard of. Cities, people of fashion, artists—the whole of it was my element and my choice; and by-and-by I married, not only where it was desirable, but where I loved. Then for the first time Death laid his staff upon my enchantment, and I understood many things that had been only words to me hitherto. To have been a husband for a year, and a father for a moment, and in that moment to lose all—this unblinded me. Looking back, it seemed to me that I had never done anything except for myself all my days. I left the world. In due time I became a priest and lived in my own country. But my worldly experience and my secular education had given to my opinions a turn too liberal for the place where my work was laid. I was soon advised concerning this by those in authority over me. And since they could not

change me and I could not change them, yet wished to work and to teach, the New World was suggested, and I volunteered to give the rest of my life to missions. It was soon found that some one was needed here, and for this little place I sailed, and to these humble people I have dedicated my service. They are pastoral creatures of the soil. Their vineyard and cattle days are apt to be like the sun and storm around them—strong alike in their evil and in their good. All their years they live as children—children with men's passions given to them like deadly weapons, unable to measure the harm their impulses may bring. Hence, even in their crimes, their hearts will generally open soon to the one great key of love, while civilization makes locks which that key cannot always fit at the first turn. And coming to know this," said Padre Ignacio, fixing his eyes steadily upon Gaston, " you will under-

stand how great a privilege it is to help such people, and how the sense of something accomplished — under God — should bring Contentment with Renunciation."

"Yes," said Gaston Villeré. Then, thinking of himself, "I can understand it in a man like you."

"Do not speak of me at all!" exclaimed the Padre, almost passionately. "But pray Heaven that you may find the thing yourself some day—Contentment with Renunciation—and never let it go."

"Amen!" said Gaston, strangely moved.

"That is the whole of my story," the priest continued, with no more of the recent stress in his voice. "And now I have talked to you about myself quite enough. But you must have my confession." He had now resumed entirely his half-playful tone. "I was just a little mistaken, you see—too self-reliant, perhaps—when I supposed, in

my first missionary ardor, that I could get on without any remembrance of the world at all. I found that I could not. And so I have taught the old operas to my choir—such parts of them as are within our compass and suitable for worship. And certain of my friends still alive at home are good enough to remember this taste of mine and to send me each year some of the new music that I should never hear of otherwise. Then we study these things also. And although our organ is a miserable affair, Felipe manages very cleverly to make it do. And while the voices are singing these operas, especially the old ones, what harm is there if sometimes the priest is thinking of something else? So there's my confession! And now, whether *Trovatore* is come or not, I shall not allow you to leave us until you have taught all you know of it to Felipe."

The new opera, however, had duly arrived. And as he turned its pages Padre Ignacio was quick to seize at once upon the music that could be taken into his church. Some of it was ready fitted. By that afternoon Felipe and his choir could have rendered "Ah! se l' error t' ingombra" without slip or falter.

Those were strange rehearsals of *Il Trovatore* upon this California shore. For the Padre looked to Gaston to say when they went too fast or too slow, and to correct their emphasis. And since it was hot, the little Erard piano was carried each day out into the mission garden. There, in the cloisters among the jessamine, the orange blossoms, the oleanders, in the presence of the round yellow hills and the blue triangle of sea, the *Miserere* was slowly learned. The Mexicans and Indians gathered, swarthy and black-haired, around the tinkling in-

strument that Felipe played; and presiding over them were young Gaston and the pale Padre, walking up and down the paths, beating time or singing now one part and now another. And so it was that the wild cattle on the uplands would hear *Trovatore* hummed by a passing *vaquero*, while the same melody was filling the streets of the far-off world.

For three days Gaston Villeré remained at Santa Ysabel del Mar; and though not a word of restlessness came from him, his host could read San Francisco and the gold-mines in his countenance. No, the young man could not have stayed here for twenty years! And the Padre forbore urging his guest to extend his visit.

"But the world is small," the guest declared at parting. "Some day it will not be able to spare you any longer. And then we are sure to meet. But

you shall hear from me soon, at any rate."

Again, as upon the first evening, the two exchanged a few courtesies, more graceful and particular than we, who have not time, and fight no duels, find worth a man's while at the present day. For duels are gone, which is a very good thing, and with them a certain careful politeness, which is a pity; but that is the way in the eternal profit and loss. So young Gaston rode northward out of the mission, back to the world and his fortune; and the Padre stood watching the dust after the rider had passed from sight. Then he went into his room with a drawn face. But appearances at least had been kept up to the end; the youth would never know of the elder man's unrest.

V

EMPTATION had arrived with Gaston, but was destined to make a longer stay at Santa Ysabel del Mar. Yet it was perhaps a week before the priest knew this guest was come to abide with him. The guest could be discreet, could withdraw, was not at first importunate.

Sail away on the barkentine? A wild notion, to be sure! although fit enough to enter the brain of such a young scapegrace. The Padre shook his head and smiled affectionately when he thought of Gaston Villeré. The youth's handsome, reckless countenance would shine out, smiling, in his memory, and he repeated Auber's

old remark, "Is it the good Lord, or is it merely the devil, that always makes me have a weakness for rascals?"

Sail away on the barkentine! Imagine taking leave of the people here—of Felipe! In what words should he tell the boy to go on industriously with his music? No, this was not imaginable! The mere parting alone would make it for ever impossible to think of such a thing. "And then," he said to himself each new morning, when he looked out at the ocean, "I have given to them my life. One does not take back a gift."

Pictures of his departure began to shine and melt in his drifting fancy. He saw himself explaining to Felipe that now his presence was wanted elsewhere; that there would come a successor to take care of Santa Ysabel—a younger man, more useful, and able to visit sick people at a distance.

"For I am old now. I should not be long here in any case." He stopped and pressed his hands together; he had caught his Temptation in the very act. Now he sat staring at his Temptation's face, close to him, while there in the triangle two ships went sailing by.

One morning Felipe told him that the barkentine was here on its return voyage south. "Indeed?" said the Padre, coldly. "The things are ready to go, I think." For the vessel called for mail and certain boxes that the mission sent away. Felipe left the room in wonder at the Padre's manner. But the priest was laughing secretly to see how little it was to him where the barkentine was, or whether it should be coming or going. But in the afternoon, at his piano, he found himself saying, "Other ships call here, at any rate." And then for the first time he prayed to be delivered from

his thoughts. Yet presently he left his seat and looked out of the window for a sight of the barkentine; but it was gone.

The season of the wine-making passed, and the preserving of all the fruits that the mission fields grew. Lotions and medicines were distilled from garden herbs. Perfume was manufactured from the petals of flowers and certain spices, and presents of it despatched to San Fernando and Ventura, and to friends at other places; for the Padre had a special receipt. As the time ran on, two or three visitors passed a night with him; and presently there was a word at various missions that Padre Ignacio had begun to show his years. At Santa Ysabel del Mar they whispered, "The Padre is not well." Yet he rode a great deal over the hills by himself, and down the cañon very often, stopping where he had sat with Gaston, to sit alone and look up and down, now

at the hills above, and now at the ocean below. Among his parishioners he had certain troubles to soothe, certain wounds to heal; a home from which he was able to drive jealousy; a girl whom he bade her lover set right. But all said, "The Padre is unwell." And Felipe told them that the music seemed nothing to him any more; he never asked for his *Dixit Dominus* nowadays. Then for a short time he was really in bed, feverish with the two voices that spoke to him without ceasing. "You have given your life," said one voice. "And, therefore," said the other, "have earned the right to go home and die." "You are winning better rewards in the service of God," said the first voice. "God can be better served in other places," answered the second. As he lay listening he saw Seville again, and the trees of Aranhal, where he had been born. The wind was blowing through

them, and in their branches he could hear the nightingales. "Empty! Empty!" he said, aloud. And he lay for two days and nights hearing the wind and the nightingales in the far trees of Aranhal. But Felipe, watching, only heard the Padre crying through the hours, "Empty! Empty!"

Then the wind in the trees died down, and the Padre could get out of bed, and soon be in the garden. But the voices within him still talked all the while as he sat watching the sails when they passed between the headlands. Their words, falling for ever the same way, beat his spirit sore, like blows upon flesh already bruised. If he could only change what they said, he would rest.

"Has the Padre any mail for Santa Barbara?" asked Felipe. "The ship bound southward should be here to-morrow."

"I will attend to it," said the priest, not moving. And Felipe stole away.

At Felipe's words the voices had stopped, as a clock finishes striking. Silence, strained like expectation, filled the Padre's soul. But in place of the voices came old sights of home again, the waving trees at Aranhal; then it would be Rachel for a moment, declaiming tragedy while a houseful of faces that he knew by name watched her; and through all the panorama rang the pleasant laugh of Gaston. For a while in the evening the Padre sat at his Erard playing *Trovatore*. Later, in his sleepless bed he lay, saying now and then: "To die at home! Surely I may be granted at least this." And he listened for the inner voices. But they were not speaking any more, and the black hole of silence grew more dreadful to him than their arguments. Then the dawn came in at his window, and he lay watching its gray grow warm into color, until suddenly he sprang from his

bed and looked at the sea. Blue it lay, sapphire-hued and dancing with points of gold, lovely and luring as a charm; and over its triangle the south-bound ship was approaching. People were on board who in a few weeks would be sailing the Atlantic, while he would stand here looking out of this same window. "Merciful God!" he cried, sinking on his knees. "Heavenly Father, Thou seest this evil in my heart! Thou knowest that my weak hand cannot pluck it out! My strength is breaking, and still Thou makest my burden heavier than I can bear." He stopped, breathless and trembling. The same visions were flitting across his closed eyes; the same silence gaped like a dry crater in his soul. "There is no help in earth or heaven," he said, very quietly; and he dressed himself.

VI

IT was still so early that few of the Indians were stirring, and one of these saddled the Padre's mule. Felipe was not yet awake, and for a moment it came in the priest's mind to open the boy's door softly, look at him once more, and come away. But this he did not, nor even take a farewell glance at the church and organ. He bade nothing farewell, but, turning his back upon his room and his garden, rode down the cañon.

The vessel lay at anchor, and some one had landed from her and was talking with other men on the shore. Seeing the priest slowly coming, this stranger approached to meet him.

"You are connected with the mission here?" he inquired.

"I—am."

"Perhaps it is with you that Gaston Villeré stopped?"

"The young man from New Orleans? Yes. I am Padre Ignacio."

"Then you'll save me a journey. I promised him to deliver these into your own hands."

The stranger gave them to him.

"A bag of gold-dust," he explained, "and a letter. I wrote it at his dictation while he was dying. He lived hardly an hour afterward."

The stranger bowed his head at the stricken cry which his news elicited from the priest, who, after a few moments' vain effort to speak, opened the letter and read:

My dear Friend,—It is through no man's fault but mine that I have come to this. I have had plenty

of luck, and lately have been counting the days until I should return home. But last night heavy news from New Orleans reached me, and I tore the pressed flower to pieces. Under the first smart and humiliation of broken faith I was rendered desperate, and picked a needless quarrel. Thank God, it is I who have the punishment. My dear friend, as I lie here, leaving a world that no man ever loved more, I have come to understand you. For you and your mission have been much in my thoughts. It is strange how good can be done, not at the time when it is intended, but afterward; and you have done this good to me. I say over your words, "Contentment with Renunciation," and believe that at this last hour I have gained something like what you would wish me to feel. For I do not think that I desire it otherwise now. My life would never have been of service, I am afraid. You are the last person in this world who has spoken serious words to me, and I want you to know that now at length I value the peace of Santa Ysabel as I could never have done but for seeing your wisdom and goodness. You spoke of a new organ for your church. Take the gold-dust that will reach you with this, and do what you will with it. Let me at least in dying have helped some one. And since there is no aristocracy in souls—you said that to me; do you remember?—perhaps you will say a mass for this departing soul of mine. I only wish, since my body must go under ground in a strange

country, that it might have been at Santa Ysabel del Mar, where your feet would often pass.

"'At Santa Ysabel del Mar, where your feet would often pass.'" The priest repeated this final sentence aloud, without being aware of it.

"Those are the last words he ever spoke," said the stranger, "except bidding me good-by."

"You knew him well, then?"

"No; not until after he was hurt. I'm the man he quarreled with."

The priest looked at the ship that would sail onward this afternoon.

Then a smile of great beauty passed over his face, and he addressed the stranger. "I thank you. You will never know what you have done for me."

"It is nothing," answered the stranger, awkwardly. "He told me you set great store on a new organ."

Padre Ignacio turned away from the ship and rode back through the gorge. When he had reached the shady place where once he had sat with Gaston Villeré, he dismounted and again sat there, alone by the stream, for many hours. Long rides and outings had been lately so much his custom that no one thought twice of his absence; and when he returned to the mission in the afternoon, the Indian took his mule, and he went to his seat in the garden. But it was with another look that he watched the sea; and presently the sail moved across the blue triangle, and soon it had rounded the headland.

With it departed Temptation for ever.

Gaston's first coming was in the Padre's mind; and, as the vespers bell began to ring in the cloistered silence, a fragment of Auber's plaintive tune passed like a sigh across his memory:

For the repose of Gaston's young, world-loving spirit, they sang all that he had taught them of *Il Trovatore*.

After this day, Felipe and all those who knew and loved the Padre best, saw serenity had returned to his features; but for some reason they began to watch those features with more care.

"Still," they said, "he is not old." And as the months went by they would repeat: "We shall have him yet for many years."

Thus the season rolled round, bringing the time for the expected messages from the world. Padre Ignacio was wont to sit in his garden, waiting for the ship, as of old.

"As of old," they said, cheerfully, who saw him. But Renunciation with Content-

ment they could not see; it was deep down in his silent and thankful heart.

One day Felipe went to call him from his garden seat, wondering why the ringing of the bell had not brought him to vespers. Breviary in lap, and hands folded upon it, the Padre sat among his flowers, looking at the sea. Out there amid the sapphire-blue, tranquil and white, gleamed the sails of the barkentine. It had brought him a new message, not from this world; and Padre Ignacio was slowly borne in from the garden, while the mission-bell tolled for the passing of a human soul.

THE END